

VZCZCXRO4590
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNO #0229/01 0941502
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041502Z APR 07
FM USMISSION USNATO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0712
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNA/DEA HQS WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHOND/DIR ONDCP WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 000229

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: U.S., UK BRIEF ISAF CONTRIBUTORS ON AFGHANISTAN
COUNTER-NARCOTICS

REF: USNATO 209

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Ian C. Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a joint briefing to the North Atlantic Council and ISAF troop contributors, INL/PDAS and Coordinator for Counternarcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan, Ambassador Thomas Schweich, and Head of the FCO's Afghan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit Peter Holland described the narcotics problems facing Afghanistan, outlined the Afghan counter-narcotics strategy, and suggested ways the Allies could help. The briefers outlined efforts to develop alternative livelihoods for farmers, pursue eradication, build Afghan police and prosecutorial capabilities, and conduct a public information campaign. While the narcotics problem was difficult, it was not insoluble and although the southern half of the country was experiencing increased poppy production the northern and central regions were seeing decreases and could be poppy free in two years. The Afghan strategy followed a multi-faceted model that had been successful elsewhere, but would require 10-15 years to succeed. In response to questions, Ambassador Schweich said the U.S. had studied proposals to create a legal opiate medicine market in Afghanistan and found the proposal lacking. END SUMMARY

AFGHANS HAVE A VIABLE STRATEGY

12. (C) The FCO's Peter Holland began by noting that President Karzai had called narcotics the greatest threat, along with terrorism, to the stability of Afghanistan. Narcotics production dominated the economy, generating about one third of economic production by value, totaling an export value of \$3.1 billion. He said there was growing nexus between the narcotics trade and the Taliban. While the narcotics problem was tough, though, it was not insoluble and progress was being made. There were real differences within Afghanistan with the situation in the south remaining difficult but real progress in the north.

13. (C) Ambassador Schweich outlined the Afghan national drug control strategy that was adopted last year and included as its main pillars legal livelihoods, institution building, information campaign, law enforcement, criminal justice, eradication, demand reduction, and regional cooperation. The public information campaign stressed that drugs were against Afghans' religion, affected relations with Afghanistan's neighbors, and exposed farmers to eradication which would leave them with no crops to harvest. Eradication played an important part in convincing farmers to shift to legal crops

that could provide a more reliable, if lower, income. Law enforcement remained a key element and it was necessary to show that all involved in the drug trade, including high-level traffickers, would be arrested and tried. An Afghan criminal justice task force has been effective in bringing prosecutions, although still only on a small scale. Schweich said he believed that over time the multi-pronged Afghan strategy could work.

PROGRESS IN THE NORTH, CHALLENGES IN THE SOUTH

¶4. (C) Schweich said narcotics production was dropping in the northern half of Afghanistan, dramatically in some places, and it was a realistic goal to make the north poppy-free within two years. A Good Performers Fund was providing assistance to poppy-free provinces. These gains in the north were offset, however, by production increases in the southern half. Forty percent of Afghanistan's poppy output came from Helmand Province, which if it were its own country would be the world's second largest opium producer -- just behind the rest of Afghanistan, he said. A recent seizure on the Afghan-Pakistan border had not only netted a record 80 tons of opium, but also a large cache of weapons and IEDs, highlighting the confluence between narcotics and anti-government forces.

¶5. (C) Holland added that negative headlines can often crowd out success stories. There is a strategy in place that was being implemented by the Afghans, which meant it could only move at the pace of Afghan capabilities. A year ago there had been no convictions of traffickers, but now about 350 had been convicted. The number of higher-level convictions should increase as Afghan institutional capabilities grow, he

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asserted. Security remained critical since without it poppy becomes a low-risk crop and alternative crops are not attractive.

PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR

¶6. (C) According to Holland, priorities over the next few years would include consolidating achievements in the north and the center, which could serve as examples for the rest of the country. Tackling corruption, including at high levels, was essential as was developing a cross-cutting counter-narcotics strategy that involved all Afghan law enforcement resources. In addition, better provincial planning and targeting was needed to tailor strategies to local conditions and PRTs could be instrumental in this effort. International support for the strategy was crucial since it would take 10-15 years to succeed.

¶7. (C) Holland said the ISAF OPLAN provided a good framework for Allies to help counter narcotics efforts. In Konduz, a PRT offered important assistance in building a counter narcotics police post. In Farah and Zabul, Allies provided logistics and air support for counter-narcotics activities, although this support was not always forthcoming from ISAF commanders and Holland said he would like to see it increase.

ALLIES FOCUS ON ALTERNATIVES, ASK ABOUT LEGALIZATION

¶8. (C) During the following discussion, Ambassador Nuland stressed the importance of a comprehensive approach to the problem and asked for a deeper explanation of the short and long-term strategy and the measures of success. Romania suggested a subsidy program or a "Buy Afghanistan" campaign to expand the market for legal crops and give the international community a sense of solidarity with the Afghans, rather than only focusing on the military side. Norway supported the emphasis on Afghan ownership and asked what could be done to address the problem of getting alternative crops to market, many of which were perishable. Spain suggested there should be greater use of UNSCR 1735 for

listing Taliban and narcotics traffickers, and asked for views on the Senlis Council's suggestion that a legal market for opium for the production of medicine be created in Afghanistan. Dutch Perm Rep Schaper emphasized the need for Afghan ownership, and relayed Dutch difficulties getting the governor of Oruzgan to focus on the narcotics problem.

¶9. (C) Ambassador Schweich replied that the U.S. had done an in-depth study of the Senlis Council proposal and found it would likely lead to increased opium production, would require deep subsidies to make the legal sale of opium competitive with the illegal market, and would increase supply in an already oversupplied legal opiates market. He agreed with Norway on the need to help farmers transport perishable, legal goods to market and said it was an important area for international assistance. Peter Holland said microcredit programs were essential to enabling alternative livelihoods, and had recently been shifted to focus on poppy-producing areas.

¶10. (C) Comment: This U.S./UK joint briefing and Q&A session were very effective in raising PermReps, awareness on counternarcotics strategy and activities in Afghanistan, and inspired further discussion on the topic in the follow-on North Atlantic Council meeting (reported reftel). End comment.
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